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**Academic English education through research-informed teaching: capturing perceptions of Bangladeshi university students and faculty members**

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Keywords:	Language learning, Academic English, Higher education, Application of learning, Research-informed teaching
Abstract:	<p>This paper arose in response to the recent impetus for embedding inquiry-based approaches in higher education. It draws upon the perceptions of students and faculty members regarding inquiry-based education in Academic English (AE) programmes at universities in Bangladesh within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. Research-informed teaching (RIT), an intellectually stimulating and inquiry-based learning approach, is the conceptual base of the study. Data were collected from four Bangladeshi universities using a learning experience survey with students (<math>n = 319</math>) and semi-structured interviews with six EFL faculty members. The findings provide four guiding principles on the design and implementation of RIT-based AE programmes: (i) addressing wider educational objectives in AE education, (ii) incorporating applied features in the learning activities, (iii) building faculty members' research literacy and practice, and (iv) establishing academic collaboration across disciplines. While the findings are derived from Bangladesh higher education, the guiding principles and strategies have resonance internationally.</p>

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**Academic English education through research-informed teaching: capturing perceptions of Bangladeshi university students and faculty members**

**1. Introduction**

Research-informed teaching (RIT) is a comparatively new educational paradigm which conveys academic goals, concepts and procedures of using research in teaching (Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Leisyte, Enders, & de Boer, 2009). The principles of RIT are generally parallel to many established educational approaches, such as research-based and problem-based teaching. In recent years, there have been growing deliberations on RIT practices, particularly in the context of higher education. The work of Griffiths (2004); Healey (2005); and Jenkins, Healey and Zetter (2007) suggests the following four key approaches to RIT:

- research-led: faculty members use research-driven information in teaching
- research-oriented: students analyse research outputs
- research-based: students conduct hands-on research, and
- research-tutored: students discuss and analyse academic issues critically

These four RIT categories encompass two broad pedagogic patterns: (i) teacher-centred: research-led and research-oriented, and (ii) student-centred: research-based and research-tutored (Healy, 2005). Weller has added a new dimension to this list which focuses on the impact of RIT on teaching as well as on faculty members’ perceptions and professional capacity building (Weller, 2016).

Findings from empirical studies supply useful evidence explaining the features and impacts of RIT in higher education curricula. For example, research conducted in the UK (Higgins, Hogg, & Robinson, 2017; Pan, Murray, Cotton, & Garmston, 2012), Hong Kong (Chan, 2017; Zhu & Pan, 2017), USA (Turns, Adams, Linse, Martin, & Atman, 2004), and Canada (Ahrensmeier, 2013) show the strengths of RIT in linking theory with practice, creating interesting and motivating learning activities, and enhancing collaboration and leadership skills among students in higher education. These studies also indicate challenges to address, for example, the requirements of extending faculty members’ functional knowledge about RIT concepts (Joseph-Richard & Jessop, 2018), creating opportunities for faculty members to conduct academic research (Chan, 2017), improving ‘research mindedness’ among students and faculty members (Ponnuswami & Harris, 2017), and ensuring essential contributions

from industry people and university leaders (Pan, Murray, Cotton, & Garmston, 2012). Additionally, like other pedagogic approaches, the research findings discuss the roles of the learning environment, pedagogic design, and stakeholders' engagement in RIT activities.

As the concepts of RIT are still developing, there remain challenges in explaining the approach fully. Describing RIT through the ethos and practices of traditional educational models is also problematic because of their dissimilar educational priorities and implementation styles. For example, traditional research-based and project-based education generally place an emphasis on student learning. On the contrary, the key strength of RIT is its power to amalgamate teaching and learning features together with pedagogic directions, such as inquiry, analysis and application of learning. However, RIT has limitations too, for example, its definitions are not inclusive and consistent enough to address research-teaching divides, disciplinary varieties and variant professional capacities of teaching practitioners (Farcas, Bernardes, & Matos, 2017; Lubbe, 2015; Weller, 2016). Besides, there is still a lack of evidence to explain RIT in diverse learning cultures, for instance, RIT is an under-researched area in the literature on South Asian higher education.

### *1.1. The scope of RIT in AE education*

Academic English (AE), a common term referring to the learning and teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), is offered in both English speaking and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts worldwide. Generally, AE programmes are expected to improve students' capacity to use specialised forms of English language in accomplishing academic studies. The content of these programmes includes wide-ranging language skills, for example, active reading, reflective and technical writing, synthesis of information using proper references, and oral presentations of ideas (De Chazal, 2014; Newton et al., 2018). As language is the vehicle for learning and teaching, the primary purpose of AE programmes is to enhance students' communication and academic skills. Additionally, they contribute to students' learning achievements through enhancing confidence, and build awareness of their complex disciplinary knowledge and academic identity (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2004). Furthermore, the scope of AE extends beyond academic studies; it enhances students' confidence for future professional life and enriches their networks with the people who can help them develop social and professional competencies (Cheng, 2016; Keefe & Shi, 2017). For these reasons, AE programmes need to be expansive in terms of their implications in students' personal, educational and professional lives.

In the current landscape of higher education, conventional teaching-learning models are changing to accommodate new educational expectations of students, educators and employers (Bhusan, 2018; Mittelman, 2017). Examples of the change include industry-relevant curricula and knowledge exchange through research (HEFCE, 2018; Jongbloed & Zomer, 2012). In terms of pedagogy, researchers and teaching practitioners across disciplines are increasingly emphasising process-driven and inquiry-based education to ensure deep and meaningful learning (Irvine, Code, & Richards, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2007; Stern, 2016). Applied features of pedagogy are being considered as an effective approach for improving students' confidence, self-esteem, and multiple perspectives (Jach & Trolan, 2019; Lim, Foo, Loh, & Deng, 2020). They can also facilitate opportunities for implementing creative and dynamic learning assessment schemes which are important elements in higher education curricula (Jessop, El Hakim, & Gibbs, 2014). These changing aims and procedures demand effective AE programmes which can prepare students to pursue inquiry-based education. However, there is a lack of evidence-based guidelines on the design and implementation of such research-integrated AE programmes. Historically, AE-related research and discussion linked to higher education have been focused mainly on the features of language skills (such as academic writing and academic reading), content, styles, grammar and assessment (Evans & Green, 2007; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2017).

### *1.2. Possible implications of using RIT in AE programmes*

Learning is an active meaning-making process (Ball & Wells, 2009; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). It is also experiential and collaborative (Vygotsky, 1978). In academic programmes, the role of language is vital as it shapes students' learning actions and processes and enables their engagement, communication and performance (Manalo & Sheppard, 2016). In RIT, students are expected to learn through inquiry, critical analysis and collaboration (Tong, Standen, & Sotiriou, 2018). These learning styles can inspire students' academic freedom and social commitment as well as connect them with future employment and professional practices. As AE programmes prepare students to partake in higher education using English language, the effective use of RIT in AE education is expected to impact positively on students' overall academic achievements and future professional work.

Although RIT can benefit AE education in many ways, the faculty members and students may face various challenges throughout the process. For example, students from different academic disciplines may struggle with unfamiliar research concepts and their application in

other disciplines (Pan, Cotton, & Murray, 2014). Unsupportive administrative systems and negative attitudes of higher management bodies may obstruct the strategies and performance of the faculty members. Furthermore, some academics may find the design and delivery of RIT time and resource demanding (Bak & Kim, 2015; Smith & Smith, 2012). For these reasons, embedding RIT in AE education needs proper readiness of the faculty members, students, and the academic institution as a whole. Generally, professional development is a vital requirement for higher education academics, particularly to implement any educational approaches, and also to guide students in achieving essential learning objectives including academic, professional and societal competencies (Asian Development Bank, 2011; Jacob, Xiong, & Ye, 2015; Shava, 2016).

The mixed implications of RIT in AE education and divergent roles of various situational factors indicate the requirement of a context-driven understanding of the associated learning and teaching processes. This paper aims to explore the practicality of RIT-based AE education in Bangladeshi universities operating within an EFL environment. The research offers an opportunity to contextualise global evidence and claims, mostly drawn from developed countries, regarding the strengths and challenges of RIT in facilitating enhanced educational experiences for students and faculty members. It also pertains to AE programmes, an uncharted educational field for RIT-related study, and thus there is a lack of significant research findings available in this area.

Stakeholders' experience and perceptions are a robust means to understand a context and its associated actors; as Nudzor contended, 'we can only experience the world through our personal perceptions, which are coloured by our preconceptions and beliefs' (Nudzor, 2009, p. 117). The study reported in this paper is centred on students' and faculty members' perceptions of using RIT as a pedagogy for AE education. The findings provide insights into several requirements for inquiry-based AE education at Bangladeshi universities with a clear emphasis on the roles of faculty members and the need for their professional development.

## 2. The study

AE is widely taught at Bangladeshi universities; and various educational issues, such as language skills, assessment and teaching outcomes, have already been explored by researchers within this country context (Sultana, 2014). More recently, some studies have investigated the feasibility of non-traditional approaches, for example, peer review techniques

and critical thinking in AE education (Chowdhury & Akteruzzaman, 2015; Shaila & Trudell, 2010). Yet, the extent and approaches to inquiry- or research-based AE education linking to Bangladesh higher education have not been studied. Hence, exploring the RIT-based AE education has the potential to provide a fresh perspective on the design and implementation of inquiry-based AE programmes in Bangladesh.

To gauge the feasibility of RIT-based AE education at Bangladeshi universities, the following five research questions were investigated.

- i) How do the university students in Bangladesh perceive the extent of RIT practice in traditional AE programmes?
- ii) To what extent is the students' application of AE learning connected with their RIT practices?
- iii) To what extent do the students' gender and academic backgrounds influence their RIT practices?
- iv) How do the faculty members conceptualise the implications of RIT in AE education at Bangladeshi universities?
- v) To what extent do the experiences and perceptions of the students and faculty members supply guidelines on RIT-based AE education?

The study took place in 2018-19. It followed an exploratory research approach which is suitable for understanding problems that have not been studied extensively (Brown, 2006).

### *2.1. The research context*

Educational practices and outcomes of the same academic programme may vary in different contexts because of dissimilar learning and teaching cultures, stakeholders' differing levels of access to resources, and varying professional capabilities of the teaching staff. AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities have their own unique features, thus it is important to consider the respective academic environments and practices while interpreting any Bangladesh-specific educational research. For example, universities in Bangladesh usually offer General English courses which do not include technical and disciplinary elements as well as professional skills suitable for employment sectors (Khan & Chaudhury, 2012). Besides, the academic programmes mainly follow traditional and rigid teaching and learning styles, and there is no organised professional development provision or professional recognition scheme for the faculty members working in this sector (Rahman et al., 2019).



Bangladesh, situated in South Asia, is a monolingual country where Bangla is the first and the most functional language in its social and business domains. However, the English language has a strong influence in employment, social capital and mobility (Erling, Hamid, & Seargeant, 2010). The country carries the legacy of two hundred years of British rule and a long tradition of English language education at all levels. Consequently, English proficiency is widely considered as an important achievement for academic, social and professional success (Hamid, Jahan, & Islam, 2013). In higher education, the key motivation of Bangladeshi students is often to learn English for 'becoming part of the English educated privileged part of the society' through better employment and connections (Rahman, 2005, p. 50). Therefore, despite various challenges of using a foreign language in academic programmes, English medium instruction and English language teaching have emerged as an important practice at the universities in Bangladesh (Islam, 2013). However, there is still a lack of clear language policy for the higher education sector resulting in confusion and inconsistencies in terms of academic content choice and medium of instruction (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Rahman, 2009).

In Bangladesh, the mainstream primary and secondary education systems (Year 1-12) follow Bangla-medium instruction. On the contrary, at many universities, the language of instruction is generally English resulting in a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning procedures. The language of instruction at the universities which participated in this research is English, and AE education is mandatory for the students studying different academic programmes. However, there is a variance in terms of the number of modules, teaching-learning hours, and lists of content in the AE programmes. As per the procedure, all the four universities had designed their AE programmes which were approved by the University Grants Commission (UGC) prior to implementing them. As a result, the naming of the programmes, lists of content, and pedagogic procedures are not exactly the same. Section 2.2.2. contains a description of the universities, students and faculty members who participated in this study.

## 2.2. Methodology

The aim of the study was to explore realistic features of RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education. Therefore, it required a research methodology which could draw context-rich data, preferably through the experience and voice of the authentic stakeholders. Furthermore, the consolidation of both the learning and teaching dimensions seemed to be essential to interpret the educational environment and activities inclusively.



Taking these principles into account, the study used a learning experience survey with students and semi-structured interviews with faculty members. The carefully devised data collection tools helped address the research questions and reach reliable conclusions. First, the survey findings provided a general picture of the RIT practice and student learning in AE programmes at the universities. Second, the interview findings supplied in-depth insights into the challenges and advantages of implementing such academic programmes. Together, the two sets of data showed the need for rethinking the aims and procedures of AE education, and also the requirement of professional development for the faculty members.

2.2.1. Data collection tools

The survey questionnaire contained twenty-two items on two broad themes: RIT-based AE practices (fifteen items based on the RIT categories discussed in Section 1), and application of AE learning in students’ higher studies and future professional work (three items). The items of the two themes were separated in six equal categories for a precise and comparative exploration (see Table 1 below). Students chose their responses from a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1953).

Table 1

Survey questions

lecturers use research findings (research-led)	In teaching, lecturers used research findings from books, journal article etc.
	Lecturers included personal research works in teaching.
	Lecturers encouraged to use research-based materials for learning.
students analyse academic topics (research-tutored)	The courses included discussion-based seminars and workshops.
	There were activities where I evaluated research papers/works.
	The courses taught me how research is conducted.
students conduct research (research-based)	I conducted literature review.
	I wrote a research paper with the supervision of a lecturer.
	I collected data using survey, interview etc. as part of my course work.
students analyse research outputs (research-oriented)	I learned techniques of describing graphs, figures etc.
	I analysed data as part of my course work.
	I learned referencing techniques.
lecturers explore their own practice (researching teaching practice)	My lecturers changed course plans according to our learning needs.
	There were various types of teaching and learning approaches.
	My lecturers observed my academic performances on a regular basis.
Application of learning	I used my learning from English language courses in other academic courses.
	I used my learning from English language courses in non-academic activities.
	My learning from English courses are helping my official activities (or in the preparation/ application for a job)

In the remaining four items, students were asked to provide information about gender, present **type of** university, respective academic discipline, and language of instruction in previous education.

The interviews were semi-structured, online via Skype, and lasted about thirty minutes each. The faculty members were asked the following questions which were expected to help draw their RIT-related concepts and practices.

- i) What does ‘teaching’ typically look like in AE programmes at your university?
- ii) When you hear the phrase ‘research-informed teaching or research-based teaching’, what comes to your mind?
- iii) What challenges do you face (or may face) while preparing research-informed teaching for your AE lessons?
- iv) Apart from faculty members and students, who do you consider **plays** an important role in the research-informed teaching practice in your AE programmes?

The interviewees were also asked several supplementary questions, such as ‘why do you think so?’, ‘can you give an example of this?’, and ‘do your colleagues perceive this in the same way?’, which helped them provide useful explanation and examples. To ensure that the interviewees understand the meaning of RIT, they were provided general definitions of the approach **at** the beginning of each interview. **In addition**, all **the** interviews were conducted in Bangla, the first language of the researcher and the interviewee faculty members, which facilitated spontaneous dialogue.

### 2.2.2. Participants

**A total of** 319 undergraduate students studying in different academic disciplines at four universities, two public and two private, in Bangladesh, participated in the survey. The universities were selected through convenience sampling technique as the researcher had access to them through their faculty members. The universities had different capacities, namely one old and large public university (about 37,000 students and 2,000 faculty members), one new and large public university (about 17,000 students and 1,000 faculty members), one comparatively old and large private university (about 12,000 students and 400 faculty members), and one new and small private university (about 4,000 students and 150 faculty members). However, all of them had their own AE programmes with different names

and syllabuses, but the key learning objectives were similar. For example, the AE syllabuses aimed to improve students' strategies and techniques to handle academic reading, writing, listening and speaking tasks; enhance their stock of academic vocabulary; and make them prepared to fulfil academic requirements and conventions, such as argumentation, analysis and citation of others' work in the writing and oral presentations.

The researcher had approached the respective AE faculty members of the universities, and they agreed to conduct the survey in their AE classes. They also helped **get the** necessary permission **for the research** from their administrative authority. The data were collected from nine classes in which the maximum **number of** students **was** about 50 and the minimum 20. The participation of students was random and voluntary, and nearly all students from each class **participated in** the survey. A total of 156 students from two public universities (88 and 68 **from each university**) and 163 students from two private universities (91 and 72 **from each university**) completed the questionnaire fully. **As the** participation rates were high, **the** researcher decided not to extend the survey to further universities. Besides, the numbers of public and private university students were comparable which ensured balance in the data.

Six faculty members, drawn through a purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2005), attended the **interviews**. Gender, age and length of professional service were not considered as determining factors. There were five male and one female faculty members, three from public and three from private universities, all **had** several years of AE teaching experience. Four faculty members were working at the three universities where the survey was conducted, and the remaining two were working at other public universities. One of the public universities did not **have** representation in the interview. However, this did not cause any **challenges for** the quality of the data as the RIT concepts and practices deliberated by the interviewees from different universities were generally consistent. Moreover, data saturation was evident from the fifth interview, probably because of the strict focus on RIT and the limited number of interview questions. The sixth interview contained frequent data saturation; thus the researcher concluded the interviews after this session.

### *2.2.3. Data processing and analysis procedure*

The research questions of the study required an exploration of the existence of RIT in traditional AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities, and the perceptions of the students and faculty members regarding RIT ethos and practices. **The survey and interviews were**

focused on these core purposes. The tools helped gather student views in numeric form and descriptive opinions from the faculty members. The data were then analysed to gain reliable findings.

First, to determine the present state of existing RIT practices and the students' experience, the survey data were processed and then analysed through the following four tests using statistical software SPSS, Version 22 (see Section 3.1).

- i) Mean scores: to compare the extents of different RIT practices at public and private universities
- ii) Bivariate Correlation: to measure the linear relationship between students' different approaches to the RIT practice and their application
- iii) Independent-Samples *t* Test and one-way ANOVA (with Tukey's HSD): for a comparative exploration of students' RIT application based on gender, academic discipline, and language of instruction in prior education

Second, through faculty members' individual commentaries, the interview data supplied useful experiential evidence about RIT-based AE education. The conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in its original form in the Bangla language. The data revealed four major themes on greater curricular aspects, namely academic objectives, application of learning, research capacity enhancement, and collaboration across academic disciplines (see Section 3.2). For the convenience of reporting the findings in English, the texts related to the themes were translated from Bangla to English.

Finally, the survey and interview results were cross-evaluated in order to achieve a richer perspective (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The findings captured both students' and faculty members' experiences and perceptions, generating a wide contextual scenario of the learning and teaching of RIT-based AE education (see Section 4).

### 3. Issues emerged from the data and their interpretation

The survey and interview data individually and collectively illuminated several areas linked to RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 below provide the students' and faculty members' perceptions of RIT-based AE education.

3.1. Students’ understanding of the extent of RIT practice in traditional AE programmes

The survey data provided fresh insights into the students’ RIT experiences in AE programmes. According to the Mean scores of the five RIT approaches, both the public and private university students experienced a moderate level of RIT practice (See Fig. 1). This suggests the scope of embedding more research activities in the traditional AE programmes. Based on Healey’s (2005) broad categorisation of RIT, the findings also show that the AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities are not entirely faculty member- or student-centred. This flexible nature of instructional approaches indicates an apparently supportive learning culture in traditional AE education which is prepared to accept more inquiry-based learning activities.

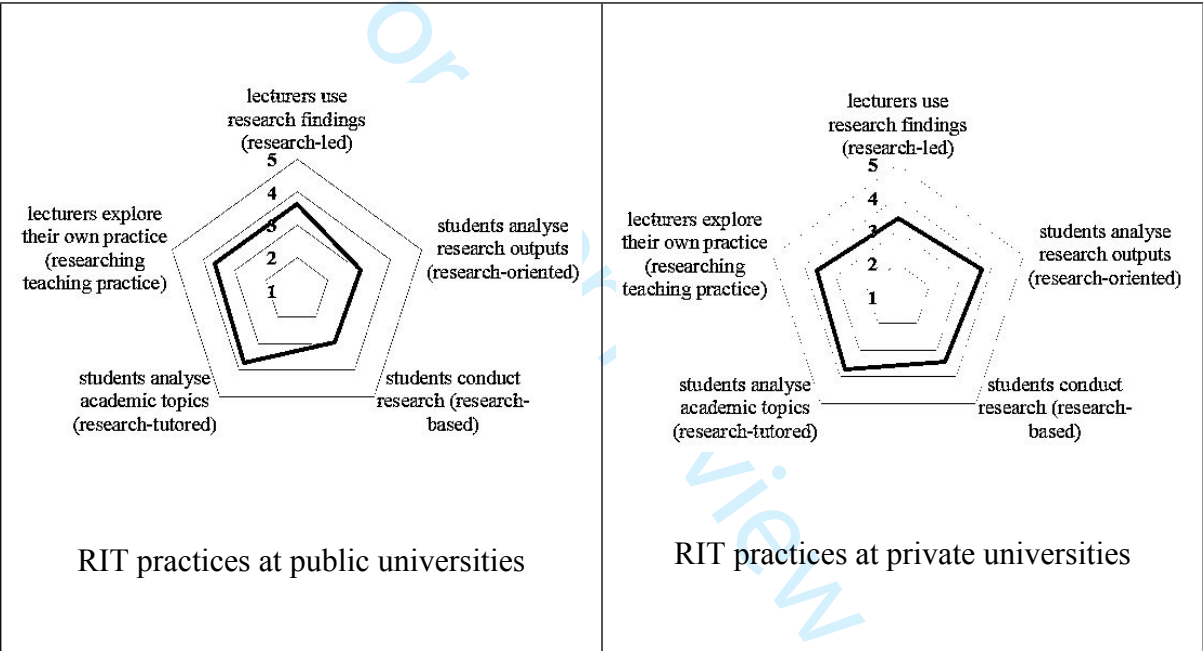


Fig. 1. Mean scores of the RIT practice (in five-point Likert scale)

According to the Pearson Correlation measurement results (see Table 2), the students’ application of learning from AE programmes was significantly connected with their research-led activities and the faculty members’ exploration of personal teaching practices (see Table 2). There was no significant relationship between the application of learning from AE programmes with the remaining three types of RIT approaches which indicates the need to expand varied applied features in AE programmes. Additionally, the findings advocate for regular pedagogic inquiries by the faculty members which has the potential to indirectly increase their students’ use of AE knowledge and skills.

**Table 2**

Correlation between RIT practices and application of AE learning

		Research-led	Research-tutored	Research-based	Research-oriented	Researching Teaching Practice
Application of the learning from AE programmes	Pearson Correlation	.250**	-.041	.100	-.001	.163**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.466	.075	.981	.003
	N	319	319	319	319	319

Independent-Samples *t* Test and ANOVA test were used to identify the significant difference among the students in terms of their RIT practices and application of the learning from AE programmes. The differences were based on the students' gender, academic discipline and language of instruction in previous education. Tukey's HSD helped identify the exact areas of difference in ANOVA results (Walker & Almond, 2010).

The results showed only one area of significant difference, which is the academic disciplines. There was more evidence of research-based AE among the science students compared to social sciences and humanities students (see Table 3). This indicates an existing disciplinary divide in the application of research-based AE learning at Bangladeshi universities. In higher education, a discipline may follow its own 'signature pedagogy', or the unique approaches to learning and teaching (Shulman, 2005). However, it seems important for the faculty members of AE programmes to inform and guide students about the application of AE learning in their respective disciplines and professional practices.

**Table 3**

Differences based on the application of AE learning (ANOVA with Tukey's HSD)

Dependent Variable	(I) Discipline	(J) Discipline	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Application of the learning from AE programmes	Science	Social Sciences	.22924*	.07726	.009
		Humanities	.52660*	.08453	.000
	Social Sciences	Humanities	.29736*	.08758	.002

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The Independent-Samples *t* Test and ANOVA results did not show any significant difference in the RIT practice among the student groups based on their gender and the language of instruction in previous education. These findings provide two important understandings. First, despite the patriarchal and conservative socio-cultural settings in Bangladesh, both male and female students can equally perform in RIT activities in AE programmes. Therefore, the faculty members should not exclude any student from participating in RIT activities based on his or her gender. Second, students from English or Bangla medium background can equally participate in the RIT-based AE activities, and they can apply their learning in higher studies and professional practices at similar levels. Therefore, it does not seem practical for the faculty members to design or implement any RIT activities solely for English or Bangla medium students.

3.2. Faculty members’ views on RIT-based AE education

The interview data supplied explanations and examples of the RIT-based AE practice in Bangladesh higher education. The following four broad themes emerged from the data which explicitly and implicitly suggest faculty members’ professional development as a vital area to consider in RIT-based AE education (see table 4).

Table 4

Themes emerged in the interview data

Theme 1	Teaching/learning objectives in RIT-based AE education
Theme 2	Key educational features of RIT-based AE programmes
Theme 3	Faculty members’ preparation for the design and implementation of RIT-based AE programmes
Theme 4	University-wide and cross-departmental initiatives to materialise effective RIT-based AE programmes

In the presentation of the themes below, pseudonyms have been used when conveying any comments of the faculty members. For differentiating the public and private university contexts, the public university faculty members have been named after colours (Hazel, Brown and Scarlet), and the private university faculty members after flowers (Azalea, Daisy and Gladiolus).



### a) Address wider educational objectives in the teaching plans

The faculty members echoed the issues of different learning cultures and research practices at pre- and post- secondary education in Bangladesh (see Section 2.1). According to Gladiolus, this difference causes various academic challenges in higher education.

There is a clear gap between secondary and university education (in Bangladesh). Research is never taught before university level, even there is a little research-like work for undergraduate students. We must accept that higher education is not primary education, this education (higher education) should create value and students should find their learning unique, unique with new approaches (Gladiolus).

‘Value added’ nature of learning is an important consideration in contemporary higher education policies where students are expected to gain authentic and transferrable education (Simkovic, 2017; Tomlinson, 2018). However, one of the common features of the traditional AE education in Bangladesh is that, generally, it is not applied; for example, the application of English language taught in these programmes is sometimes unsuitable to industries or professional settings, as Hazel mentioned.

We have created artificial (English) language patterns with many locally designed forms .... We force our students to speak or write like this which often does not represent the world ... here we have made the language different and isolated from offices and industries which we need to re-think seriously (Hazel).

Furthermore, Brown observed that the AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities often do not take academic disciplines and relevant professional application into consideration.

These (AE) are just general English courses. Our universities have failed to design ESP (English for Specific Purposes) programmes for individual disciplines .... My Pharmacy students want a dedicated English module that can reflect their studies ... some students think they do not need it (AE) as they will study Computer Science, or Economics, and they need to know the technical terms and words used in those subjects (Brown).

Connected to this point, Azalea emphasised the need for addressing employability skills which can enhance students’ professional capacity in addition to improving academic skills.

Bangladesh wants a strong workforce; the university graduates eagerly wait to get a good job just after their studies. We really want that kind of education which can prepare our students for working in national and international organisations (Azalea).

The views of the faculty members suggest considering **more** educational objectives, for example, authentic learning, knowledge and skills transfer, and employability while designing and implementing RIT in AE programmes. However, the interview data revealed a few concerns, for example, students' lack of awareness about the importance of strong language foundation for studying disciplinary subjects and performing well in professions. Similarly, some university higher management bodies are not willing to take risks of embracing new educational **approaches**.

Most students take English courses as a survival factor, they do not have any passion or personal interest for this subject. They give full attention to their major courses, say Computer Science or Physics, and want to do well in those subjects (Daisy).

University authority, even many of my colleagues, will not support research-based teaching. They like their many years' teaching styles and believe the methods are working well. So, why will they support the idea of accepting entirely a new teaching style (Hazel)?

#### **b) Embed applied features in the learning activities**

The faculty members reflected on the unique procedures of learning in the traditional AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities. They found that 'the sole objective of the **AE** education is to develop students' language skills needed for pursuing higher studies' (Scarlet). Although the pedagogy for this academic programme sometimes involve participatory and collaborative learning activities, the learning topics and content are predominantly general and non-technical (Hazel). Moreover, the activities rarely follow any holistic approach **through** integrating four language skills, namely speaking, reading, writing and listening.

... (Academic English) courses are reading and writing focused, there is no listening or speaking schemes for assessment, this is the scenario of all public universities in Bangladesh. There is no opportunity for students to apply all the language skills... I tried to include some innovative assessment schemes to improve my students' four

1  
2  
3 language skills, but I was not allocated enough classes and my colleagues were not  
4 interested to try out this new approach with me (Scarlet).

5  
6  
7 Students do small projects, activities are mainly discussion and presentation related.  
8 They are very interested to present their ideas, they prefer to take challenges, they like  
9 fun activities, games, some things which are very new ... (Brown).

10  
11  
12  
13  
14 Hazel reported a different scenario at his university which mainly offers science and  
15 engineering programmes which follow a unique curriculum and teaching procedures,  
16 including lab sessions. As a result, the AE programme at his university is separated in theory  
17 and practical sessions. Similar to the lab sessions in engineering disciplines, the practical  
18 sessions are held at a specially designed lab with audio visual facilities, which Hazel  
19 criticised as an unnecessary and ineffective arrangement.

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25 I do not think we need a separate practice-lab for our AE programmes. Our lab means  
26 only the audio-visual facilities which can be arranged in regular classrooms very  
27 easily. I find it extremely difficult to label my English lessons and their contents as  
28 either theory or practical sessions (Hazel).

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30  
31  
32  
33 Scarlet identified a 'text-book centred and unadventurous' educational culture at many  
34 Bangladeshi universities which is opposite to any inquiry-based and industry-focused  
35 educational environment (Scarlet). Brown and Gladiolus emphasised the implementation of  
36 external-facing and profession-focused AE programmes.

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41 Social engagement is the key to learning a language. All subjects teach how to apply  
42 the learning for greater good of the society and people. Academic English must  
43 include some activities that allow students to connect their learning with social issues.  
44 Once, I asked my students to visit local small shops to make a list of English words  
45 they use. The students successfully completed the assignment and the presentations  
46 were great (Brown)!

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51 This is the time we must shift to ESP (English for Specific Purposes) ... all our  
52 Academic English Programmes have become EGP (English for General Purposes).  
53 Students do not know how this English will help them studying Journalism or  
54 Psychology. We must think this issue seriously ... (Gladiolus).

### c) Build personal research literacy and practice

All the interviewee faculty members conceptualised the features and implications of RIT in AE education partially, and to some extent, differently. For example, they defined this approach as ‘inquiring effective ways of teaching’, i.e., researching teaching practice (Azalea); ‘using journal papers, books etc. in the class’, i.e., research-led (Hazel); ‘a systematic analysis of situations’, i.e., research-tutored (Daisy); and faculty members’ exploration of suitable learning content for effective AE teaching, i.e., researching teaching practice (Gladiolus).

There are many scholarly discussions around the world on what type of content should be used in English teaching and how they should be presented to students.

Research-based teaching means an inquiry to those academic contents (Gladiolus).

The faculty members’ lack of in-depth understanding of RIT is not unexpected because inquiry-based learning and teaching concepts of higher education are still developing. Moreover, the pedagogic procedures involved in this approach are complex as research-teaching nexus creates multifaceted and dissimilar educational views to individual disciplines and academics (Healey, 2005; Nicholson, 2017).

The interview data also revealed some common myths about RIT. For example, Gladiolus found a deeply-rooted belief of faculty members that undergraduate students and some universities are not ready for implementing inquiry-based education.

There are faculty members who determine the level of students based on the type of their respective university (public or private). Some even think the students are too young to do the complex tasks of research activities. They are afraid of introducing research at undergraduate level ... (Azalea).

Yet, faculty members, such as Brown, expressed interest in applying international RIT models in Bangladesh, but suggested that their suitability in the local context should be checked first.

There may be new teaching approaches invented in the Western world and the practitioners found them very effective, and we need to know them and test here. However, we should modify the approaches. I cannot think of any ELT (English

Language Teaching) method that can be directly implemented in Bangladesh without any changes (Brown).

#### **d) Expand professional collaboration across disciplines**

The faculty members labelled AE education as ‘non-lab based’, thus easily compatible for incorporating research components like exploration, scientific evidence, collaboration and critical thinking (Scarlet and Azalea). Moreover, they believed RIT can be implemented with small budgets, but the impacts will be significant.

It is very possible to create research opportunities for students with a small amount of money. The expenses are only for travel, some snacks etc., but the students get a great motivation. This is a very small amount and the university should keep this budget to improve the quality of Academic English teaching. This will also create a research culture in our universities (Brown).

Conversely, various challenges in implementing RIT emerged from the interviews, for example, the faculty members anticipated possible resistance from their colleagues and higher management bodies.

Presently at my university, we are shifting towards an outcome-based curriculum.... there is a confusion about pedagogies for this approach which is creating a collegial clash and collegial imbalance ... (Daisy).

Another problem is that the faculty members working in different academic departments ‘meet rarely on any teaching related issues apart from checking if there is any conflict in timetabling or room allocation’ (Hazel). The anxiety of the senior management regarding action research is another challenge.

(University leaders) ... see teachers’ research as something which may expose the weakness of teaching and students’ qualities in their institution. The teaching hours are also very long. Unlike Western universities the funding for research, mainly for the humanities department, is almost nil... (Gladiolus).

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**4. Analysis of the results and lessons learned**

The interview and survey results show connections between the RIT practice and application in traditional AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities. For example, the statistical analysis of the extent of different types of RIT practice helps predict the possibility of addressing educational objectives of RIT-based AE programmes mentioned in the interviews. Similarly, the survey results about the roles of academic discipline in AE education shed light on faculty members’ preparation of the design and implementation of RIT-based AE education. In the analysis of the results below, pertinent contextual and conceptual issues add richer perspectives and provide four guiding principles for the future implementation of RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education.

First, the faculty members mentioned the gap in learning cultures between pre- and post-secondary education in Bangladesh which is a barrier to the effective implementation of RIT-based AE education. The research practice at the early educational stages are almost absent (Anwaruddin & Pervin, 2015; Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010), which indicates RIT as a new and problematic approach for many university students and faculty members. Additionally, because of the highly decentralised nature of the higher education system in Bangladesh, there is a lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of the academic programmes at the universities which is essential to maintain proper academic standards.

The faculty members highlighted the lack of applied features in AE programmes where RIT approaches can potentially contribute. Their concerns regarding the lack of scope for applying the learning in core academic subjects and future professional fields suggest considering the wider application of AE English, for example, building of employability skills. Therefore, in terms of greater educational goals of any academic programme, such as cognitive, affective and practical outcomes (Bowen & Fincher, 2018), RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh need to redefine their traditional educational objectives. The survey results demonstrate the flexible nature of current AE education towards lecturer-centred and student-centred academic environments which appear to be supportive in this change process. They also show academic disciplines as an important factor in AE learning, which demands addressing students’ disciplinary as well as employability competence while designing educational objectives for such programmes. The views of the students and faculty members reflected in the results advocate for extensive curricular changes with new learning objectives. To accommodate this, the universities would need to consider devising strong

academic support mechanisms which can deal with necessary curriculum and pedagogic changes. However, developing independent support-systems may not be possible at all universities because of the lack of budget and relevant policies, but an inter-university network may be a practical solution to address this. Presently, the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) is the only regulatory body to oversee the universities, but its capacity is limited mainly within areas of administrative and financial monitoring (Alam, Haque, & Siddique, 2007). Yet, there are a few government and international donor funded projects operational in the country, such as World Bank funded Higher Education Acceleration and Transformation project (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2019) and the British Council funded Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning project (British Council, 2020) which can consider supporting this type of RIT-based educational planning and implementation.

Second, students mentioned the limited application of RIT-based AE learning. It is plausible that the lack of application is demotivating for them as they do not find the academic programme useful in the long run. The faculty members mentioned that the AE programmes are often general, textbook centred and non-technical thus they are not linked to wider academic, social and professional environments. As a result, the students do not have opportunities to apply the language skills they learn in the AE programmes. Bangladesh higher education curricula are generally 'traditional and rigid' where higher-order cognitive skills and soft skills are not practised regularly (Rahman et al., 2019). The AE programmes explored in this research possibly contain the same features, and they also do not facilitate adequate opportunities for practising applied and professional skills.

However, employment sectors worldwide generally prefer purposefully prepared students as employees (Dugan, 2012), therefore RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education need to prioritise employability and lifelong learning skills in their programme design and delivery. For many students in Bangladesh, the key motivation to pursue higher studies is securing employment where English language skills are an important requirement (Sultana, 2014). Preparing 'globally minded, work-ready graduates' is also the core objective of higher education across the world (Martin, 2018, p. 15). In this regard, discipline-focused and industry-facing AE education can prepare students for their future professions and work. The faculty members who were interviewed believed inquiry-based AE programmes contain these features and can help students apply learning within and beyond academic purposes.



Third, students in the survey reported a moderate level of the RIT practice indicating the need for widening RIT activities in AE programmes. Hence, the effective implementation of RIT requires the faculty members' adequate understanding of the forms and approaches to RIT, features of RIT environments, and possible impacts of RIT on students' learning journeys. They also need to be critical in evaluating educational contexts as well as academic plans linked to RIT (Author, 2018). However, professional development of faculty members in higher education is challenging across the world because of many strongly embedded academic beliefs and pedagogic conventions (Gibbs, 2015).

There are various misconceptions, such as RIT is inappropriate for the universities which are not research-intensive and for the practitioners who do not have a solid research background (Jessop & Wu, 2017). In the interviews, the faculty members also shared a belief that undergraduate students are not well-prepared to partake in RIT activities. However, this myth has been debunked by research evidence showing the successful implementation of inquiry-based academic activities at early phases of higher education (Tong et al., 2018). Yet, the educational context of Bangladesh is different, thus RIT-based AE in the country would require the faculty members' expertise in research as well as their ability to contextualise RIT approaches taken from other educational settings.

In the survey, students mentioned that the faculty members sometimes conduct pedagogic inquiries which indicates a positive sign of their interest and involvement with academic research. However, it is not clear if they prefer conducting research for professional purposes only, or they want to use it for improving teaching and learning practices. Generally, professional development for faculty members in Bangladesh higher education is a new and unstructured process (Raqib, 2019), thus any faculty development initiatives for RIT-based AE programmes may go through challenges and take a long time to be successful. The task may become more difficult if university leaders consider RIT as a resource-demanding and unnecessary approach for AE education. For this reason, the implementation of RIT in AE or any other academic programmes may require involving university management and regulatory bodies along with the key stakeholders, namely the students and faculty members.

Fourth, the faculty members in their interviews mentioned the absence of collaboration among academic departments and faculty members which appears to be a hindrance to the implementation of RIT-based AE programmes. In RIT, collaboration across disciplines is vital, particularly for creating a dialogic and collegial professional culture (Fullan, 2002).

Besides, due to the rapid expansion of knowledge economy, modern higher education concepts advocate interdisciplinary approaches to teaching, learning and research (Holley, 2017; Jacob, 2015), and there is also an ongoing call for promoting civic engagement (Taylor, 2007). These expectations cannot be dealt with only textbook-based and individual lecturer-led education. The survey results indicate the influence of academic disciplines in RIT-based AE teaching and learning. Therefore, the AE faculty members need to work together with faculty members of other academic subjects to design and deliver effective discipline-focused AE programmes. However, this may create difficulties in standardising AE syllabuses, particularly the learning outcomes and assessment criteria as, in higher education, learning expectations and pedagogic procedures vary among academic disciplines (Shulman, 2005). Therefore, pedagogic and content-related flexibility is expected while collaborating with different academic disciplines and faculty members on RIT-based AE education. Besides, there might be a need for networking and collaboration with industries and community organisations to ensure that the RIT-based AE education is external-facing and relevant to the real-world. Presently, the English education in Bangladesh does not address the demands of industries and professions in adequate manner (Roshid & Webb, 2013). This gap can be minimised by collaborative efforts in RIT-based AE education with the aim to provide long-term and applied learning experiences to students.

The analysis of the survey and interview results suggest the following key lessons to consider when designing and implementing RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education.

- RIT-based AE education requires wide academic objectives and application of learning addressing both the academic study and professional capacity building aspects.
- RIT-based AE education demands external-facing, cross-disciplinary and applied learning activities. Traditional pedagogic practices and beliefs may challenge these dynamic approaches.
- The faculty members of RIT-based AE programmes need to develop personal research expertise and cross-disciplinary content knowledge to deal with diverse learning goals, preferences and learning cultures of different disciplines. They need to know their students' backgrounds and decide suitable RIT activities for them.

- Collaboration between AE faculty members and the faculty members of other disciplines as well as higher management bodies is essential. This can help identify students’ discipline-focused academic and professional needs and bring the senior management staff on board to enable university-wide change initiatives.

5. Conclusion

The study reports students’ and faculty members’ perceptions of the research-informed teaching (RIT) approach and its feasibility in Academic English (AE) education at Bangladeshi universities. The global evidence on RIT demonstrates powerful educational features which can promote learning through inquiry and application as well as creating process-driven and meaningful academic environments. The findings suggest considering four distinct areas, namely academic objectives, application of learning, professional development of the faculty members, and cross-disciplinary collaboration for implementing successful RIT-based AE programmes. Overall, they call for a rigorous change in curricular plans and pedagogic practices as well as the stakeholders’ understanding of RIT-based AE programmes. It is plausible that many faculty members and institutional leaders may find RIT as an unconventional and resource-demanding pedagogy. Additionally, there may be a lack of professional capacity and time constraints, thus some faculty members may be less confident and demotivated in such an educational model. However, the findings supply several positive indications regarding the traditional AE education at Bangladeshi universities, for example, its pedagogic flexibility and openness, faculty members’ interest in research, and the universities’ academic and administrative freedom which are supportive of RIT-related change processes.

The findings and recommendations detailed in this paper are drawn from Bangladesh higher education, within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This is a small-scale research project involving students and faculty members from only four universities which may not represent educational ethos and practices of all other higher educational institutions of the country. Additionally, the perceived views of the students and faculty members are only some of many dimensions, such as AE education policies and the expectations of employers linked to AE learning and teaching at universities. However, the baseline understanding of RIT-based AE education and the lessons learned from the study can be utilised in other AE programmes at similar universities, particularly those situated in EFL context. Yet, while transferring the learning and recommendations to other educational

settings, contextualisation would be an essential step to follow with specific attention to the needs and expectations of the stakeholders, such as faculty members, students and university management staff. The task requires a holistic understanding of various educational processes, thus more studies on the interplay **between** actors are essential. The effectiveness and challenges of discipline-focused and cross-disciplinary approaches is another important area to explore. Overall, the research in this field needs to be context-rich so that it can provide realistic guidelines on the implementation of RIT-based AE education.

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## Academic English education through research-informed teaching: capturing perceptions of Bangladeshi university students and faculty members

### 1. Introduction

Research-informed teaching (RIT) is a comparatively new educational paradigm which conveys academic goals, concepts and procedures of using research in teaching (Healey & Jenkins, 2009; Leisyte, Enders, & de Boer, 2009). The principles of RIT are generally parallel to many established educational approaches, such as research-based and problem-based teaching. In recent years, there have been growing deliberations on RIT practices, particularly in the context of higher education. The work of Griffiths (2004); Healey (2005); and Jenkins, Healey and Zetter (2007) suggests the following four key approaches to RIT:

- research-led: faculty members use research-driven information in teaching
- research-oriented: students analyse research outputs
- research-based: students conduct hands-on research, and
- research-tutored: students discuss and analyse academic issues critically

These four RIT categories encompass two broad pedagogic patterns: (i) teacher-centred: research-led and research-oriented, and (ii) student-centred: research-based and research-tutored (Healy, 2005). Weller has added a new dimension to this list which focuses on the impact of RIT on teaching as well as on faculty members' perceptions and professional capacity building (Weller, 2016).

Findings from empirical studies supply useful evidence explaining the features and impacts of RIT in higher education curricula. For example, research conducted in the UK (Higgins, Hogg, & Robinson, 2017; Pan, Murray, Cotton, & Garmston, 2012), Hong Kong (Chan, 2017; Zhu & Pan, 2017), USA (Turns, Adams, Linse, Martin, & Atman, 2004), and Canada (Ahrensmeier, 2013) show the strengths of RIT in linking theory with practice, creating interesting and motivating learning activities, and enhancing collaboration and leadership skills among students in higher education. These studies also indicate challenges to address, for example, the requirements of extending faculty members' functional knowledge about RIT concepts (Joseph-Richard & Jessop, 2018), creating opportunities for faculty members to conduct academic research (Chan, 2017), improving 'research mindedness' among students and faculty members (Ponnuswami & Harris, 2017), and ensuring essential contributions

from industry people and university leaders (Pan, Murray, Cotton, & Garmston, 2012). Additionally, like other pedagogic approaches, the research findings discuss the roles of the learning environment, pedagogic design, and stakeholders' engagement in RIT activities.

As the concepts of RIT are still developing, there remain challenges in explaining the approach fully. Describing RIT through the ethos and practices of traditional educational models is also problematic because of their dissimilar educational priorities and implementation styles. For example, traditional research-based and project-based education generally place an emphasis on student learning. On the contrary, the key strength of RIT is its power to amalgamate teaching and learning features together with pedagogic directions, such as inquiry, analysis and application of learning. However, RIT has limitations too, for example, its definitions are not inclusive and consistent enough to address research-teaching divides, disciplinary varieties and variant professional capacities of teaching practitioners (Farcas, Bernardes, & Matos, 2017; Lubbe, 2015; Weller, 2016). Besides, there is still a lack of evidence to explain RIT in diverse learning cultures, for instance, RIT is an under-researched area in the literature on South Asian higher education.

*1.1. The scope of RIT in AE education*

Academic English (AE), a common term referring to the learning and teaching of English for Academic Purposes (EAP), is offered in both English speaking and English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts worldwide. Generally, AE programmes are expected to improve students' capacity to use specialised forms of English language in accomplishing academic studies. The content of these programmes includes wide-ranging language skills, for example, active reading, reflective and technical writing, synthesis of information using proper references, and oral presentations of ideas (De Chazal, 2014; Newton et al., 2018). As language is the vehicle for learning and teaching, the primary purpose of AE programmes is to enhance students' communication and academic skills. Additionally, they contribute to students' learning achievements through enhancing confidence, and build awareness of their complex disciplinary knowledge and academic identity (Bloome, Carter, Christian, Otto, & Shuart-Faris, 2004). Furthermore, the scope of AE extends beyond academic studies; it enhances students' confidence for future professional life and enriches their networks with the people who can help them develop social and professional competencies (Cheng, 2016; Keefe & Shi, 2017). For these reasons, AE programmes need to be expansive in terms of their implications in students' personal, educational and professional lives.

In the current landscape of higher education, conventional teaching-learning models are changing to accommodate new educational expectations of students, educators and employers (Bhusan, 2018; Mittelman, 2017). Examples of the change include industry-relevant curricula and knowledge exchange through research (HEFCE, 2018; Jongbloed & Zomer, 2012). In terms of pedagogy, researchers and teaching practitioners across disciplines are increasingly emphasising process-driven and inquiry-based education to ensure deep and meaningful learning (Irvine, Code, & Richards, 2013; Jenkins et al., 2007; Stern, 2016). Applied features of pedagogy are being considered as an effective approach for improving students' confidence, self-esteem, and multiple perspectives (Jach & Trolan, 2019; Lim, Foo, Loh, & Deng, 2020). They can also facilitate opportunities for implementing creative and dynamic learning assessment schemes which are important elements in higher education curricula (Jessop, El Hakim, & Gibbs, 2014). These changing aims and procedures demand effective AE programmes which can prepare students to pursue inquiry-based education. However, there is a lack of evidence-based guidelines on the design and implementation of such research-integrated AE programmes. Historically, AE-related research and discussion linked to higher education have been focused mainly on the features of language skills (such as academic writing and academic reading), content, styles, grammar and assessment (Evans & Green, 2007; Flowerdew & Peacock, 2001; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2017).

### *1.2. Possible implications of using RIT in AE programmes*

Learning is an active meaning-making process (Ball & Wells, 2009; Rogers & Freiberg, 1994). It is also experiential and collaborative (Vygotsky, 1978). In academic programmes, the role of language is vital as it shapes students' learning actions and processes and enables their engagement, communication and performance (Manalo & Sheppard, 2016). In RIT, students are expected to learn through inquiry, critical analysis and collaboration (Tong, Standen, & Sotiriou, 2018). These learning styles can inspire students' academic freedom and social commitment as well as connect them with future employment and professional practices. As AE programmes prepare students to partake in higher education using English language, the effective use of RIT in AE education is expected to impact positively on students' overall academic achievements and future professional work.

Although RIT can benefit AE education in many ways, the faculty members and students may face various challenges throughout the process. For example, students from different academic disciplines may struggle with unfamiliar research concepts and their application in

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other disciplines (Pan, Cotton, & Murray, 2014). Unsupportive administrative systems and negative attitudes of higher management bodies may obstruct the strategies and performance of the faculty members. Furthermore, some academics may find the design and delivery of RIT time and resource demanding (Bak & Kim, 2015; Smith & Smith, 2012). For these reasons, embedding RIT in AE education needs proper readiness of the faculty members, students, and the academic institution as a whole. Generally, professional development is a vital requirement for higher education academics, particularly to implement any educational approaches, and also to guide students in achieving essential learning objectives including academic, professional and societal competencies (Asian Development Bank, 2011; Jacob, Xiong, & Ye, 2015; Shava, 2016).

The mixed implications of RIT in AE education and divergent roles of various situational factors indicate the requirement of a context-driven understanding of the associated learning and teaching processes. This paper aims to explore the practicality of RIT-based AE education in Bangladeshi universities operating within an EFL environment. The research offers an opportunity to contextualise global evidence and claims, mostly drawn from developed countries, regarding the strengths and challenges of RIT in facilitating enhanced educational experiences for students and faculty members. It also pertains to AE programmes, an uncharted educational field for RIT-related study, and thus there is a lack of significant research findings available in this area.

Stakeholders’ experience and perceptions are a robust means to understand a context and its associated actors, as Nudzor contended, ‘we can only experience the world through our personal perceptions, which are coloured by our preconceptions and beliefs’ (Nudzor, 2009, p. 117). The study reported in this paper is centred on students’ and faculty members’ perceptions of using RIT as a pedagogy for AE education. The findings provide insights into several requirements for inquiry-based AE education at Bangladeshi universities with a clear emphasis on the roles of faculty members and the need for their professional development.

**2. The study**

AE is widely taught at Bangladeshi universities; and various educational issues, such as language skills, assessment and teaching outcomes, have already been explored by researchers within this country context (Sultana, 2014). More recently, some studies have investigated the feasibility of non-traditional approaches, for example, peer review techniques



and critical thinking in AE education (Chowdhury & Akteruzzaman, 2015; Shaila & Trudell, 2010). Yet, the extent and approaches to inquiry- or research-based AE education linking to Bangladesh higher education have not been studied. Hence, exploring the RIT-based AE education has the potential to provide a fresh perspective on the design and implementation of inquiry-based AE programmes in Bangladesh.

To gauge the feasibility of RIT-based AE education at Bangladeshi universities, the following five research questions were investigated.

- i) How do the university students in Bangladesh perceive the extent of RIT practice in traditional AE programmes?
- ii) To what extent is the students' application of AE learning connected with their RIT practices?
- iii) To what extent do the students' gender and academic backgrounds influence their RIT practices?
- iv) How do the faculty members conceptualise the implications of RIT in AE education at Bangladeshi universities?
- v) To what extent do the experiences and perceptions of the students and faculty members supply guidelines on RIT-based AE education?

The study took place in 2018-19. It followed an exploratory research approach which is suitable for understanding problems that have not been studied extensively (Brown, 2006).

### 2.1. The research context

Educational practices and outcomes of the same academic programme may vary in different contexts because of dissimilar learning and teaching cultures, stakeholders' differing levels of access to resources, and varying professional capabilities of the teaching staff. AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities have their own unique features, thus it is important to consider the respective academic environments and practices while interpreting any Bangladesh-specific educational research. For example, universities in Bangladesh usually offer General English courses which do not include technical and disciplinary elements as well as professional skills suitable for employment sectors (Khan & Chaudhury, 2012). Besides, the academic programmes mainly follow traditional and rigid teaching and learning styles, and there is no organised professional development provision or professional recognition scheme for the faculty members working in this sector (Rahman et al., 2019).



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Bangladesh, situated in South Asia, is a monolingual country where Bangla is the first and the most functional language in its social and business domains. However, the English language has a strong influence in employment, social capital and mobility (Erling, Hamid, & Seargeant, 2010). The country carries the legacy of two hundred years of British rule and a long tradition of English language education at all levels. Consequently, English proficiency is widely considered as an important achievement for academic, social and professional success (Hamid, Jahan, & Islam, 2013). In higher education, the key motivation of Bangladeshi students is often to learn English for ‘becoming part of the English educated privileged part of the society’ through better employment and connections (Rahman, 2005, p. 50). Therefore, despite various challenges of using a foreign language in academic programmes, English medium instruction and English language teaching have emerged as an important practice at the universities in Bangladesh (Islam, 2013). However, there is still a lack of clear language policy for the higher education sector resulting in confusion and inconsistencies in terms of academic content choice and medium of instruction (Chowdhury & Kabir, 2014; Rahman, 2009).

In Bangladesh, the mainstream primary and secondary education systems (Year 1-12) follow Bangla-medium instruction. On the contrary, at many universities, the language of instruction is generally English resulting in a paradigm shift in the teaching and learning procedures. The language of instruction at the universities which participated in this research is English, and AE education is mandatory for the students studying different academic programmes. However, there is a variance in terms of the number of modules, teaching-learning hours, and lists of content in the AE programmes. As per the procedure, all the four universities had designed their AE programmes which were approved by the University Grants Commission (UGC) prior to implementing them. As a result, the naming of the programmes, lists of content, and pedagogic procedures are not exactly the same. Section 2.2.2. contains a description of the universities, students and faculty members who participated in this study.

2.2. Methodology

The aim of the study was to explore realistic features of RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education. Therefore, it required a research methodology which could draw context-rich data, preferably through the experience and voice of the authentic stakeholders. Furthermore, the consolidation of both the learning and teaching dimensions seemed to be essential to interpret the educational environment and activities inclusively.

Taking these principles into account, the study used a learning experience survey with students and semi-structured interviews with faculty members. The carefully devised data collection tools helped address the research questions and reach reliable conclusions. First, the survey findings provided a general picture of the RIT practice and student learning in AE programmes at the universities. Second, the interview findings supplied in-depth insights into the challenges and advantages of implementing such academic programmes. Together, the two sets of data showed the need for rethinking the aims and procedures of AE education, and also the requirement of professional development for the faculty members.

### 2.2.1. Data collection tools

The survey questionnaire contained twenty-two items on two broad themes: RIT-based AE practices (fifteen items based on the RIT categories discussed in Section 1), and application of AE learning in students' higher studies and future professional work (three items). The items of the two themes were separated in six equal categories for a precise and comparative exploration (see Table 1 below). Students chose their responses from a five-point Likert scale (Likert, 1953).

**Table 1**

#### Survey questions

<i>lecturers use research findings (research-led)</i>	In teaching, lecturers used research findings from books, journal article etc.
	Lecturers included personal research works in teaching.
	Lecturers encouraged to use research-based materials for learning.
<i>students analyse academic topics (research-tutored)</i>	The courses included discussion-based seminars and workshops.
	There were activities where I evaluated research papers/works.
	The courses taught me how research is conducted.
<i>students conduct research (research-based)</i>	I conducted literature review.
	I wrote a research paper with the supervision of a lecturer.
	I collected data using survey, interview etc. as part of my course work.
<i>students analyse research outputs (research-oriented)</i>	I learned techniques of describing graphs, figures etc.
	I analysed data as part of my course work.
	I learned referencing techniques.
<i>lecturers explore their own practice (researching teaching practice)</i>	My lecturers changed course plans according to our learning needs.
	There were various types of teaching and learning approaches.
	My lecturers observed my academic performances on a regular basis.
<i>Application of learning</i>	I used my learning from English language courses in other academic courses.
	I used my learning from English language courses in non-academic activities.
	My learning from English courses are helping my official activities (or in the preparation/ application for a job)

In the remaining four items, students were asked to provide information about gender, present type of university, respective academic discipline, and language of instruction in previous education.

The interviews were semi-structured, online via Skype, and lasted about thirty minutes each. The faculty members were asked the following questions which were expected to help draw their RIT-related concepts and practices.

- i) What does 'teaching' typically look like in AE programmes at your university?
- ii) When you hear the phrase 'research-informed teaching or research-based teaching', what comes to your mind?
- iii) What challenges do you face (or may face) while preparing research-informed teaching for your AE lessons?
- iv) Apart from faculty members and students, who do you consider plays an important role in the research-informed teaching practice in your AE programmes?

The interviewees were also asked several supplementary questions, such as 'why do you think so?', 'can you give an example of this?', and 'do your colleagues perceive this in the same way?', which helped them provide useful explanation and examples. To ensure that the interviewees understand the meaning of RIT, they were provided general definitions of the approach at the beginning of each interview. In addition, all the interviews were conducted in Bangla, the first language of the researcher and the interviewee faculty members, which facilitated spontaneous dialogue.

### 2.2.2. Participants

A total of 319 undergraduate students studying in different academic disciplines at four universities, two public and two private, in Bangladesh, participated in the survey. The universities were selected through convenience sampling technique as the researcher had access to them through their faculty members. The universities had different capacities, namely one old and large public university (about 37,000 students and 2,000 faculty members), one new and large public university (about 17,000 students and 1,000 faculty members), one comparatively old and large private university (about 12,000 students and 400 faculty members), and one new and small private university (about 4,000 students and 150 faculty members). However, all of them had their own AE programmes with different names

and syllabuses, but the key learning objectives were similar. For example, the AE syllabuses aimed to improve students' strategies and techniques to handle academic reading, writing, listening and speaking tasks; enhance their stock of academic vocabulary; and make them prepared to fulfil academic requirements and conventions, such as argumentation, analysis and citation of others' work in the writing and oral presentations.

The researcher had approached the respective AE faculty members of the universities, and they agreed to conduct the survey in their AE classes. They also helped **get the** necessary permission **for the research** from their administrative authority. The data were collected from nine classes in which the maximum **number of** students **was** about 50 and the minimum 20. The participation of students was random and voluntary, and nearly all students from each class **participated in** the survey. A total of 156 students from two public universities (88 and 68 **from each university**) and 163 students from two private universities (91 and 72 **from each university**) completed the questionnaire fully. **As the** participation rates were high, **the** researcher decided not to extend the survey to further universities. Besides, the numbers of public and private university students were comparable which ensured balance in the data.

Six faculty members, drawn through a purposive sampling technique (Patton, 2005), attended the **interviews**. Gender, age and length of professional service were not considered as determining factors. There were five male and one female faculty members, three from public and three from private universities, all **had** several years of AE teaching experience. Four faculty members were working at the three universities where the survey was conducted, and the remaining two were working at other public universities. One of the public universities did not **have** representation in the interview. However, this did not cause any **challenges for** the quality of the data as the RIT concepts and practices deliberated by the interviewees from different universities were generally consistent. Moreover, data saturation was evident from the fifth interview, probably because of the strict focus on RIT and the limited number of interview questions. The sixth interview contained frequent data saturation; thus the researcher concluded the interviews after this session.

### *2.2.3. Data processing and analysis procedure*

The research questions of the study required an exploration of the existence of RIT in traditional AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities, and the perceptions of the students and faculty members regarding RIT ethos and practices. **The survey and interviews were**

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focused on these core purposes. The tools helped gather student views in numeric form and descriptive opinions from the faculty members. The data were then analysed to gain reliable findings.

First, to determine the present state of existing RIT practices and the students’ experience, the survey data were processed and then analysed through the following four tests using statistical software SPSS, Version 22 (see Section 3.1).

- i) Mean scores: to compare the extents of different RIT practices at public and private universities
- ii) Bivariate Correlation: to measure the linear relationship between students’ different approaches to the RIT practice and their application
- iii) Independent-Samples *t* Test and one-way ANOVA (with Tukey’s HSD): for a comparative exploration of students’ RIT application based on gender, academic discipline, and language of instruction in prior education

Second, through faculty members’ individual commentaries, the interview data supplied useful experiential evidence about RIT-based AE education. The conversations were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim in its original form in the Bangla language. The data revealed four major themes on greater curricular aspects, namely academic objectives, application of learning, research capacity enhancement, and collaboration across academic disciplines (see Section 3.2). For the convenience of reporting the findings in English, the texts related to the themes were translated from Bangla to English.

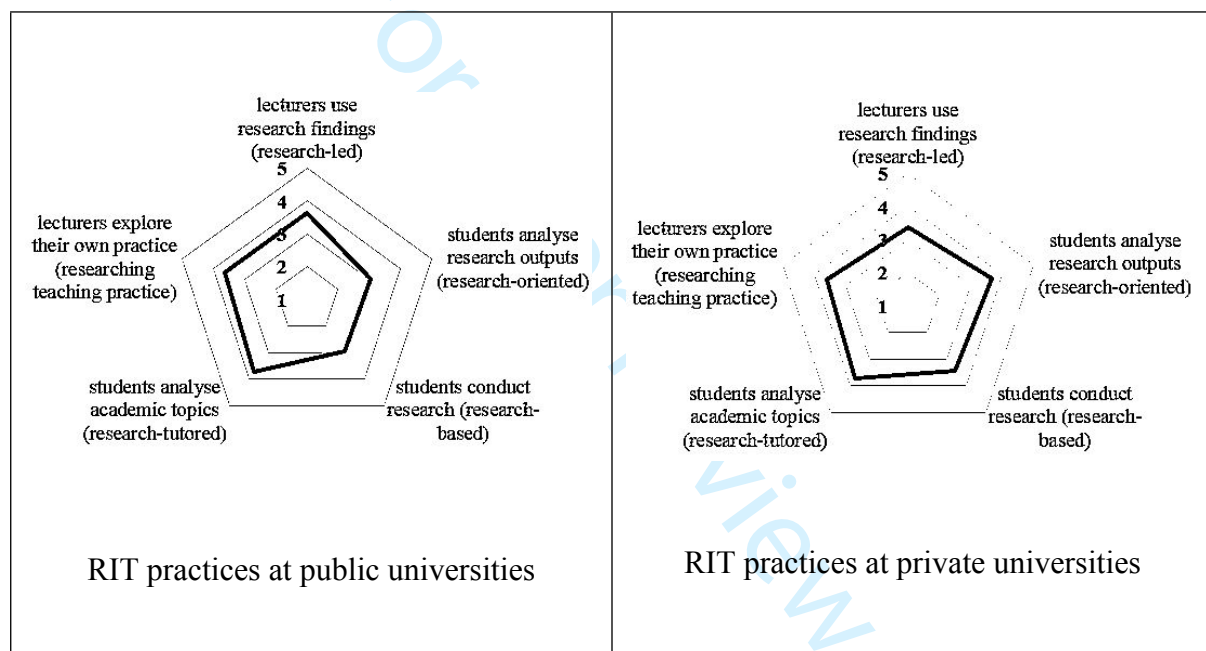
Finally, the survey and interview results were cross-evaluated in order to achieve a richer perspective (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009). The findings captured both students’ and faculty members’ experiences and perceptions, generating a wide contextual scenario of the learning and teaching of RIT-based AE education (see Section 4).

**3. Issues emerged from the data and their interpretation**

The survey and interview data individually and collectively illuminated several areas linked to RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education. Sections 3.1 and 3.2 below provide the students’ and faculty members’ perceptions of RIT-based AE education.

### 3.1. Students' understanding of the extent of RIT practice in traditional AE programmes

The survey data provided fresh insights into the students' RIT experiences in AE programmes. According to the Mean scores of the five RIT approaches, both the public and private university students experienced a moderate level of RIT practice (See Fig. 1). This suggests the scope of embedding more research activities in the traditional AE programmes. Based on Healey's (2005) broad categorisation of RIT, the findings also show that the AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities are not entirely faculty member- or student-centred. This flexible nature of instructional approaches indicates an apparently supportive learning culture in traditional AE education which is prepared to accept more inquiry-based learning activities.



**Fig. 1.** Mean scores of the RIT practice (in five-point Likert scale)

According to the Pearson Correlation measurement results (see Table 2), the students' application of learning from AE programmes was significantly connected with their research-led activities and the faculty members' exploration of personal teaching practices (see Table 2). There was no significant relationship between the application of learning from AE programmes with the remaining three types of RIT approaches which indicates the need to expand varied applied features in AE programmes. Additionally, the findings advocate for regular pedagogic inquiries by the faculty members which has the potential to indirectly increase their students' use of AE knowledge and skills.



Table 2

Correlation between RIT practices and application of AE learning

Application of the learning from AE programmes		Research-led	Research-tutored	Research-based	Research-oriented	Researching Teaching Practice
	Pearson Correlation	.250**	-.041	.100	-.001	.163**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.466	.075	.981	.003
	N	319	319	319	319	319

Independent-Samples *t* Test and ANOVA test were used to identify the significant difference among the students in terms of their RIT practices and application of the learning from AE programmes. The differences were based on the students’ gender, academic discipline and language of instruction in previous education. Tukey’s HSD helped identify the exact areas of difference in ANOVA results (Walker & Almond, 2010).

The results showed only one area of significant difference, which is the academic disciplines. There was more evidence of research-based AE among the science students compared to social sciences and humanities students (see Table 3). This indicates an existing disciplinary divide in the application of research-based AE learning at Bangladeshi universities. In higher education, a discipline may follow its own ‘signature pedagogy’, or the unique approaches to learning and teaching (Shulman, 2005). However, it seems important for the faculty members of AE programmes to inform and guide students about the application of AE learning in their respective disciplines and professional practices.

Table 3

Differences based on the application of AE learning (ANOVA with Tukey’s HSD)

Dependent Variable	(I) Discipline	(J) Discipline	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig.
Application of the learning from AE programmes	Science	Social Sciences	.22924*	.07726	.009
		Humanities	.52660*	.08453	.000
	Social Sciences	Humanities	.29736*	.08758	.002

\*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

The Independent-Samples  $t$  Test and ANOVA results did not show any significant difference in the RIT practice among the student groups based on their gender and the language of instruction in previous education. These findings provide two important understandings. First, despite the patriarchal and conservative socio-cultural settings in Bangladesh, both male and female students can equally perform in RIT activities in AE programmes. Therefore, the faculty members should not exclude any student from participating in RIT activities based on his or her gender. Second, students from English or Bangla medium background can equally participate in the RIT-based AE activities, and they can apply their learning in higher studies and professional practices at similar levels. Therefore, it does not seem practical for the faculty members to design or implement any RIT activities solely for English or Bangla medium students.

### 3.2. Faculty members' views on RIT-based AE education

The interview data supplied explanations and examples of the RIT-based AE practice in Bangladesh higher education. The following four broad themes emerged from the data which explicitly and implicitly suggest faculty members' professional development as a vital area to consider in RIT-based AE education (see table 4).

**Table 4**

Themes emerged in the interview data

Theme 1	Teaching/learning objectives in RIT-based AE education
Theme 2	Key educational features of RIT-based AE programmes
Theme 3	Faculty members' preparation for the design and implementation of RIT-based AE programmes
Theme 4	University-wide and cross-departmental initiatives to materialise effective RIT-based AE programmes

In the presentation of the themes below, pseudonyms have been used **when** conveying any comments of the faculty members. For differentiating the public and private university contexts, the public university faculty members have been named after colours (Hazel, Brown and Scarlet), and the private university faculty members after flowers (Azalea, Daisy and Gladiolus).

### a) Address wider educational objectives in the teaching plans

The faculty members echoed the issues of different learning cultures and research practices at pre- and post- secondary education in Bangladesh (see Section 2.1). According to Gladiolus, this difference causes various academic challenges in higher education.

There is a clear gap between secondary and university education (in Bangladesh). Research is never taught before university level, even there is a little research-like work for undergraduate students. We must accept that higher education is not primary education, this education (higher education) should create value and students should find their learning unique, unique with new approaches (Gladiolus).

'Value added' nature of learning is an important consideration in contemporary higher education policies where students are expected to gain authentic and transferrable education (Simkovic, 2017; Tomlinson, 2018). However, one of the common features of the traditional AE education in Bangladesh is that, generally, it is not applied; for example, the application of English language taught in these programmes is sometimes unsuitable to industries or professional settings, as Hazel mentioned.

We have created artificial (English) language patterns with many locally designed forms .... We force our students to speak or write like this which often does not represent the world ... here we have made the language different and isolated from offices and industries which we need to re-think seriously (Hazel).

Furthermore, Brown observed that the AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities often do not take academic disciplines and relevant professional application into consideration.

These (AE) are just general English courses. Our universities have failed to design ESP (English for Specific Purposes) programmes for individual disciplines .... My Pharmacy students want a dedicated English module that can reflect their studies ... some students think they do not need it (AE) as they will study Computer Science, or Economics, and they need to know the technical terms and words used in those subjects (Brown).

Connected to this point, Azalea emphasised the need for addressing employability skills which can enhance students' professional capacity in addition to improving academic skills.

Bangladesh wants a strong workforce; the university graduates eagerly wait to get a good job just after their studies. We really want that kind of education which can prepare our students for working in national and international organisations (Azalea).

The views of the faculty members suggest considering **more** educational objectives, for example, authentic learning, knowledge and skills transfer, and employability while designing and implementing RIT in AE programmes. However, the interview data revealed a few concerns, for example, students' lack of awareness about the importance of strong language foundation for studying disciplinary subjects and performing well in professions. Similarly, some university higher management bodies are not willing to take risks of embracing new educational **approaches**.

Most students take English courses as a survival factor, they do not have any passion or personal interest for this subject. They give full attention to their major courses, say Computer Science or Physics, and want to do well in those subjects (Daisy).

University authority, even many of my colleagues, will not support research-based teaching. They like their many years' teaching styles and believe the methods are working well. So, why will they support the idea of accepting entirely a new teaching style (Hazel)?

#### **b) Embed applied features in the learning activities**

The faculty members reflected on the unique procedures of learning in the traditional AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities. They found that 'the sole objective of the **AE** education is to develop students' language skills needed for pursuing higher studies' (Scarlet). Although the pedagogy for this academic programme sometimes involve participatory and collaborative learning activities, the learning topics and content are predominantly general and non-technical (Hazel). Moreover, the activities rarely follow any holistic approach **through** integrating four language skills, namely speaking, reading, writing and listening.

... (Academic English) courses are reading and writing focused, there is no listening or speaking schemes for assessment, this is the scenario of all public universities in Bangladesh. There is no opportunity for students to apply all the language skills... I tried to include some innovative assessment schemes to improve my students' four

language skills, but I was not allocated enough classes and my colleagues were not interested to try out this new approach with me (Scarlet).

Students do small projects, activities are mainly discussion and presentation related. They are very interested to present their ideas, they prefer to take challenges, they like fun activities, games, some things which are very new ... (Brown).

Hazel reported a different scenario at his university which mainly offers science and engineering programmes which follow a unique curriculum and teaching procedures, including lab sessions. As a result, the AE programme at his university is separated in theory and practical sessions. Similar to the lab sessions in engineering disciplines, the practical sessions are held at a specially designed lab with audio visual facilities, which Hazel criticised as an unnecessary and ineffective arrangement.

I do not think we need a separate practice-lab for our AE programmes. Our lab means only the audio-visual facilities which can be arranged in regular classrooms very easily. I find it extremely difficult to label my English lessons and their contents as either theory or practical sessions (Hazel).

Scarlet identified a 'text-book centred and unadventurous' educational culture at many Bangladeshi universities which is opposite to any inquiry-based and industry-focused educational environment (Scarlet). Brown and Gladiolus emphasised the implementation of external-facing and profession-focused AE programmes.

Social engagement is the key to learning a language. All subjects teach how to apply the learning for greater good of the society and people. Academic English must include some activities that allow students to connect their learning with social issues. Once, I asked my students to visit local small shops to make a list of English words they use. The students successfully completed the assignment and the presentations were great (Brown)!

This is the time we must shift to ESP (English for Specific Purposes) ... all our Academic English Programmes have become EGP (English for General Purposes). Students do not know how this English will help them studying Journalism or Psychology. We must think this issue seriously ... (Gladiolus).

### c) Build personal research literacy and practice

All the interviewee faculty members conceptualised the features and implications of RIT in AE education partially, and to some extent, differently. For example, they defined this approach as ‘inquiring effective ways of teaching’, i.e., researching teaching practice (Azalea); ‘using journal papers, books etc. in the class’, i.e., research-led (Hazel); ‘a systematic analysis of situations’, i.e., research-tutored (Daisy); and faculty members’ exploration of suitable learning content for effective AE teaching, i.e., researching teaching practice (Gladiolus).

There are many scholarly discussions around the world on what type of content should be used in English teaching and how they should be presented to students.

Research-based teaching means an inquiry to those academic contents (Gladiolus).

The faculty members’ lack of in-depth understanding of RIT is not unexpected because inquiry-based learning and teaching concepts of higher education are still developing. Moreover, the pedagogic procedures involved in this approach are complex as research-teaching nexus creates multifaceted and dissimilar educational views to individual disciplines and academics (Healey, 2005; Nicholson, 2017).

The interview data also revealed some common myths about RIT. For example, Gladiolus found a deeply-rooted belief of faculty members that undergraduate students and some universities are not ready for implementing inquiry-based education.

There are faculty members who determine the level of students based on the type of their respective university (public or private). Some even think the students are too young to do the complex tasks of research activities. They are afraid of introducing research at undergraduate level ... (Azalea).

Yet, faculty members, such as Brown, expressed interest in applying international RIT models in Bangladesh, but suggested that their suitability in the local context should be checked first.

There may be new teaching approaches invented in the Western world and the practitioners found them very effective, and we need to know them and test here. However, we should modify the approaches. I cannot think of any ELT (English



Language Teaching) method that can be directly implemented in Bangladesh without any changes (Brown).

#### **d) Expand professional collaboration across disciplines**

The faculty members labelled AE education as ‘non-lab based’, thus easily compatible for incorporating research components like exploration, scientific evidence, collaboration and critical thinking (Scarlet and Azalea). Moreover, they believed RIT can be implemented with small budgets, but the impacts will be significant.

It is very possible to create research opportunities for students with a small amount of money. The expenses are only for travel, some snacks etc., but the students get a great motivation. This is a very small amount and the university should keep this budget to improve the quality of Academic English teaching. This will also create a research culture in our universities (Brown).

Conversely, various challenges in implementing RIT emerged from the interviews, for example, the faculty members anticipated possible resistance from their colleagues and higher management bodies.

Presently at my university, we are shifting towards an outcome-based curriculum.... there is a confusion about pedagogies for this approach which is creating a collegial clash and collegial imbalance ... (Daisy).

Another problem is that the faculty members working in different academic departments ‘meet rarely on any teaching related issues apart from checking if there is any conflict in timetabling or room allocation’ (Hazel). The anxiety of the senior management regarding action research is another challenge.

(University leaders) ... see teachers’ research as something which may expose the weakness of teaching and students’ qualities in their institution. The teaching hours are also very long. Unlike Western universities the funding for research, mainly for the humanities department, is almost nil... (Gladiolus).

#### 4. Analysis of the results and lessons learned

The interview and survey results show connections between the RIT practice and application in traditional AE programmes at Bangladeshi universities. For example, the statistical analysis of the extent of different types of RIT practice helps predict the possibility of addressing educational objectives of RIT-based AE programmes mentioned in the interviews. Similarly, the survey results about the roles of academic discipline in AE education shed light on faculty members' preparation of the design and implementation of RIT-based AE education. In the analysis of the results below, pertinent contextual and conceptual issues add richer perspectives and provide four guiding principles for the future implementation of RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education.

First, the faculty members mentioned the gap in learning cultures between pre- and post-secondary education in Bangladesh which is a barrier to the effective implementation of RIT-based AE education. The research practice at the early educational stages are almost absent (Anwaruddin & Pervin, 2015; Rahman, Hamzah, Meerah, & Rahman, 2010), which indicates RIT as a new and problematic approach for many university students and faculty members. Additionally, because of the highly decentralised nature of the higher education system in Bangladesh, there is a lack of systematic monitoring and evaluation of the academic programmes at the universities which is essential to maintain proper academic standards.

The faculty members highlighted the lack of applied features in AE programmes where RIT approaches can potentially contribute. Their concerns regarding the lack of scope for applying the learning in core academic subjects and future professional fields suggest considering the wider application of AE English, for example, building of employability skills. Therefore, in terms of greater educational goals of any academic programme, such as cognitive, affective and practical outcomes (Bowen & Fincher, 2018), RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh need to redefine their traditional educational objectives. The survey results demonstrate the flexible nature of current AE education towards lecturer-centred and student-centred academic environments which appear to be supportive in this change process. They also show academic disciplines as an important factor in AE learning, which demands addressing students' disciplinary as well as employability competence while designing educational objectives for such programmes. The views of the students and faculty members reflected in the results advocate for extensive curricular changes with new learning objectives. To accommodate this, the universities would need to consider devising strong

academic support mechanisms which can deal with necessary curriculum and pedagogic changes. However, developing independent support-systems may not be possible at all universities because of the lack of budget and relevant policies, but an inter-university network may be a practical solution to address this. Presently, the University Grants Commission of Bangladesh (UGC) is the only regulatory body to oversee the universities, but its capacity is limited mainly within areas of administrative and financial monitoring (Alam, Haque, & Siddique, 2007). Yet, there are a few government and international donor funded projects operational in the country, such as World Bank funded Higher Education Acceleration and Transformation project (University Grants Commission of Bangladesh, 2019) and the British Council funded Centre of Excellence in Teaching and Learning project (British Council, 2020) which can consider supporting this type of RIT-based educational planning and implementation.

Second, students mentioned the limited application of RIT-based AE learning. It is plausible that the lack of application is demotivating for them as they do not find the academic programme useful in the long run. The faculty members mentioned that the AE programmes are often general, textbook centred and non-technical thus they are not linked to wider academic, social and professional environments. As a result, the students do not have opportunities to apply the language skills they learn in the AE programmes. Bangladesh higher education curricula are generally 'traditional and rigid' where higher-order cognitive skills and soft skills are not practised regularly (Rahman et al., 2019). The AE programmes explored in this research possibly contain the same features, and they also do not facilitate adequate opportunities for practising applied and professional skills.

However, employment sectors worldwide generally prefer purposefully prepared students as employees (Dugan, 2012), therefore RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education need to prioritise employability and lifelong learning skills in their programme design and delivery. For many students in Bangladesh, the key motivation to pursue higher studies is securing employment where English language skills are an important requirement (Sultana, 2014). Preparing 'globally minded, work-ready graduates' is also the core objective of higher education across the world (Martin, 2018, p. 15). In this regard, discipline-focused and industry-facing AE education can prepare students for their future professions and work. The faculty members who were interviewed believed inquiry-based AE programmes contain these features and can help students apply learning within and beyond academic purposes.

Third, students in the survey reported a moderate level of the RIT practice indicating the need for widening RIT activities in AE programmes. Hence, the effective implementation of RIT requires the faculty members' adequate understanding of the forms and approaches to RIT, features of RIT environments, and possible impacts of RIT on students' learning journeys. They also need to be critical in evaluating educational contexts as well as academic plans linked to RIT (Author, 2018). However, professional development of faculty members in higher education is challenging across the world because of many strongly embedded academic beliefs and pedagogic conventions (Gibbs, 2015).

There are various misconceptions, such as RIT is inappropriate for the universities which are not research-intensive and for the practitioners who do not have a solid research background (Jessop & Wu, 2017). In the interviews, the faculty members also shared a belief that undergraduate students are not well-prepared to partake in RIT activities. However, this myth has been debunked by research evidence showing the successful implementation of inquiry-based academic activities at early phases of higher education (Tong et al., 2018). Yet, the educational context of Bangladesh is different, thus RIT-based AE in the country would require the faculty members' expertise in research as well as their ability to contextualise RIT approaches taken from other educational settings.

In the survey, students mentioned that the faculty members sometimes conduct pedagogic inquiries which indicates a positive sign of their interest and involvement with academic research. However, it is not clear if they prefer conducting research for professional purposes only, or they want to use it for improving teaching and learning practices. Generally, professional development for faculty members in Bangladesh higher education is a new and unstructured process (Raqib, 2019), thus any faculty development initiatives for RIT-based AE programmes may go through challenges and take a long time to be successful. The task may become more difficult if university leaders consider RIT as a resource-demanding and unnecessary approach for AE education. For this reason, the implementation of RIT in AE or any other academic programmes may require involving university management and regulatory bodies along with the key stakeholders, namely the students and faculty members.

Fourth, the faculty members in their interviews mentioned the absence of collaboration among academic departments and faculty members which appears to be a hindrance to the implementation of RIT-based AE programmes. In RIT, collaboration across disciplines is vital, particularly for creating a dialogic and collegial professional culture (Fullan, 2002).

Besides, due to the rapid expansion of knowledge economy, modern higher education concepts advocate interdisciplinary approaches to teaching, learning and research (Holley, 2017; Jacob, 2015), and there is also an ongoing call for promoting civic engagement (Taylor, 2007). These expectations cannot be dealt with only textbook-based and individual lecturer-led education. The survey results indicate the influence of academic disciplines in RIT-based AE teaching and learning. Therefore, the AE faculty members need to work together with faculty members of other academic subjects to design and deliver effective discipline-focused AE programmes. However, this may create difficulties in standardising AE syllabuses, particularly the learning outcomes and assessment criteria as, in higher education, learning expectations and pedagogic procedures vary among academic disciplines (Shulman, 2005). Therefore, pedagogic and content-related flexibility is expected while collaborating with different academic disciplines and faculty members on RIT-based AE education. Besides, there might be a need for networking and collaboration with industries and community organisations to ensure that the RIT-based AE education is external-facing and relevant to the real-world. Presently, the English education in Bangladesh does not address the demands of industries and professions in adequate manner (Roshid & Webb, 2013). This gap can be minimised by collaborative efforts in RIT-based AE education with the aim to provide long-term and applied learning experiences to students.

The analysis of the survey and interview results suggest the following key lessons to consider when designing and implementing RIT-based AE programmes in Bangladesh higher education.

- RIT-based AE education requires wide academic objectives and application of learning addressing both the academic study and professional capacity building aspects.
- RIT-based AE education demands external-facing, cross-disciplinary and applied learning activities. Traditional pedagogic practices and beliefs may challenge these dynamic approaches.
- The faculty members of RIT-based AE programmes need to develop personal research expertise and cross-disciplinary content knowledge to deal with diverse learning goals, preferences and learning cultures of different disciplines. They need to know their students' backgrounds and decide suitable RIT activities for them.

- Collaboration between AE faculty members and the faculty members of other disciplines as well as higher management bodies is essential. This can help identify students' discipline-focused academic and professional needs and bring the senior management staff on board to enable university-wide change initiatives.

## 5. Conclusion

The study reports students' and faculty members' perceptions of the research-informed teaching (RIT) approach and its feasibility in Academic English (AE) education at Bangladeshi universities. The global evidence on RIT demonstrates powerful educational features which can promote learning through inquiry and application as well as creating process-driven and meaningful academic environments. The findings suggest considering four distinct areas, namely academic objectives, application of learning, professional development of the faculty members, and cross-disciplinary collaboration for implementing successful RIT-based AE programmes. Overall, they call for a rigorous change in curricular plans and pedagogic practices as well as the stakeholders' understanding of RIT-based AE programmes. It is plausible that many faculty members and institutional leaders may find RIT as an unconventional and resource-demanding pedagogy. Additionally, there may be a lack of professional capacity and time constraints, thus some faculty members may be less confident and demotivated in such an educational model. However, the findings supply several positive indications regarding the traditional AE education at Bangladeshi universities, for example, its pedagogic flexibility and openness, faculty members' interest in research, and the universities' academic and administrative freedom which are supportive of RIT-related change processes.

The findings and recommendations detailed in this paper are drawn from Bangladesh higher education, within an English as a Foreign Language (EFL) context. This is a small-scale research project involving students and faculty members from only four universities which may not represent educational ethos and practices of all other higher educational institutions of the country. Additionally, the perceived views of the students and faculty members are only some of many dimensions, such as AE education policies and the expectations of employers linked to AE learning and teaching at universities. However, the baseline understanding of RIT-based AE education and the lessons learned from the study can be utilised in other AE programmes at similar universities, particularly those situated in EFL context. Yet, while transferring the learning and recommendations to other educational



settings, contextualisation would be an essential step to follow with specific attention to the needs and expectations of the stakeholders, such as faculty members, students and university management staff. The task requires a holistic understanding of various educational processes, thus more studies on the interplay **between** actors are essential. The effectiveness and challenges of discipline-focused and cross-disciplinary approaches is another important area to explore. Overall, the research in this field needs to be context-rich so that it can provide realistic guidelines on the implementation of RIT-based AE education.

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